

threatens their monopoly on education. In part it reflects a secular discomfort with religious institutions.

I myself have felt this discomfort over the years, walking past Catholic schools like St. Gregory the Great, near my Manhattan home. Every morning, as I took my sons to public school, I couldn't help noticing the well-behaved black and Hispanic children in their neat uniforms entering the drab parish building. But my curiosity never led me past the imposing crucifix looking down from the roof, which evoked childhood images of Catholic anti-Semitism and clerical obscurantism.

Finally, earlier this year, I ventured in, and I was impressed. I sat in, for example, as fourth-grade teacher Susan Viti conducted a review lesson on the geography of the Western United States. All the children were completely engaged and had obviously done their homework. They were able to answer each of her questions about the principal cities and capitals of the Western states—some of which I couldn't name—and the topography and natural resources of the region. "Which minerals would be found in the Rocky Mountains?" Miss Viti asked. Eager hands shot up. Miss Viti used the lesson to expand the students' vocabulary; when the children wrote things down, she insisted on proper grammar and spelling.

I found myself wishing that my own son's fourth-grade teachers at nearby Public School 87, reputedly one of the best public schools in the city, were anywhere near as productive and as focused on basic skills as Miss Viti. Both my boys' teachers have wasted an enormous amount of time with empty verbiage about the evils of racism and sexism. By contrast, in Miss Viti's class and in all the other Catholic-school classes I visited, it was taken for granted that a real education is the best antidote to prejudice.

Miss Viti earns \$21,000 a year, \$8,000 less than a first-year public-school teacher. "I've taught in an all-white, affluent suburban school, where I made over \$40,000," she says. "This time I wanted to do something good for society, and I am lucky enough to be able to afford to do it. I am trying to instill in my students that whatever their life situation is now, they can succeed if they work hard and study."

You might expect liberals, self-styled champions of disadvantaged children, to applaud the commitment and sacrifice of educators like Susan Viti. You might even expect them to look for ways of getting government money to these underfunded schools. Instead, they've done their best to make sure the wall of separation between church and state remains impenetrable. Liberal child-advocacy groups tout an endless array of "prevention" programs that are supposed to stave off delinquency, dropping out of school and teen pregnancy—yet they consistently ignore Catholic schools, which nearly always succeed in preventing these pathologies.

Read the chapter on education in Hillary Clinton's "It Takes a Village." Mrs. Clinton advocates an alphabet soup of education programs for poor kids, but says not a word about Catholic schools. Similarly, in his books on education and inner-city ghettos, Jonathan Kozol offers vivid tours of decrepit public schools in places like the South Bronx, but he never stops at the many Catholic schools that are succeeding a few blocks away.

Why are Catholic schools taboo among those who talk loudest about compassion for the downtrodden? It's hard to escape the conclusion that one of the most powerful reasons is liberals' alliance with the teachers' unions, which have poured hundreds of millions of dollars into the campaign coffers

of liberal candidates around the country. Two weeks ago I attended the National Education Association convention in Washington, a week-long pep rally for Bill Clinton punctuated by ritual denunciations of privatization.

Before the teachers' unions rise to political power, it was not unusual to see urban Democrats like former New York Gov. Mario Cuomo support government aid to Catholic schools. Mr. Cuomo's flip-flop on this issue is especially revealing. In 1974, when he first ran for public office, Mr. Cuomo wrote a letter to potential supporters: "I've spent more than 15 years . . . arguing for aid to private schools," he wrote. "If you believe aid is a good thing, then you are the good people. If you believe it, then it's your moral obligation, as it is my own, to do something about it. . . . Let's try tax-credit plans and anything else that offers any help."

Mr. Cuomo soon learned his lesson. In his published diaries he wrote: "Teachers are perhaps the most effective of all the state's unions. If they go all-out, it will mean telephones and vigorous statewide support. It will also mean some money." In his 1982 campaign for governor, Mr. Cuomo gave a speech trumpeting the primacy of public education and the rights of teachers. He won the union's enthusiastic endorsement against Ed Koch in the Democratic primary. Over the next 12 years, in private meetings with Catholic leaders, Gov. Cuomo would declare that he still supported tax relief for parochial school parents. Then he would take a completely different position in public. For example, in 1984 he acknowledged that giving tax credits for parochial-school tuition was "clearly constitutional" under a recent Supreme Court decision—but he refused to support such a plan.

Politically controlled schools are unlikely to improve much without strong pressure from outside. Thus, the case for government aid to Catholic schools is now more compelling than ever, if only to provide the competitive pressure to force state schools to change. And the conventional wisdom that government is constitutionally prohibited from aiding Catholic schools has been undermined by several recent U.S. Supreme Court decisions.

SUCKER'S TRAP

Since the powerful teachers' unions vehemently oppose any form of government aid to Catholic schools, reformers are often skittish about advocating vouchers or tuition tax credits, fearing that will end the public-school reform conversation before it begins. But to abandon aid to Catholic schools in the name of public-school reform is a sucker's trap. We have ended up with no aid to Catholic schools and no real public-school reform either.

Catholic schools are a valuable public resource not just because they profoundly benefit the children who enroll in them. They also challenge the public school monopoly, constantly reminding us that the neediest kids are educable and that spending extravagant sums of money isn't the answer. No one who cares about reviving our failing public schools can afford to ignore this inspiring laboratory of reform.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. MICHAEL P. FORBES

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, July 22, 1996

Mr. FORBES. Mr. Speaker, on July 18, 1996, I was absent from the House of Rep-

resentatives due to the tragic explosion on TWA Flight 800 over the First Congressional District of New York. I felt it was appropriate to return to my district to support and comfort my constituents impacted by this disaster as well as to help coordinate local, State, and Federal search and rescue efforts.

Had I been present I would have voted "yes" on roll No. 327, "yes" on roll No. 328, "no" on roll No. 329, "no" on roll No. 330, and "yes" on roll No. 331.

PROVIDING FOR CONSIDERATION OF H.R. 3734, WELFARE AND MEDICAID REFORM ACT OF 1996

SPEECH OF

HON. LOUIS STOKES

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, July 17, 1996

Mr. STOKES. Mr. Chairman, I rise in opposition to H.R. 3734, the Balanced Budget Welfare Reform Act, a bill designed to overhaul our Nation's welfare system. Fifteen months ago, many of my colleagues and I stood before this body and showed our staunch disagreement with the House-passed welfare reform bill which made disastrous cuts in our Nation's welfare programs. I wish I could say that, since then, some compassion and reason had been interjected into this debate and produced a more favorable bill for consideration.

Unfortunately, H.R. 3734, the bill being deliberated today, targets the poorest in this country, in order to meet Republican budget priorities. When we examine the provisions of this legislation, it is abundantly clear that our colleagues have reneged on their commitment to ensure a "family friendly" Congress and to protect our Nation's children.

H.R. 3734 slashes more than \$61 billion over 6 years in welfare programs. This bill guts funding for the Food Stamp Program, cuts into the SSI protections for disabled children, drastically cuts child nutrition programs, and slashes benefits for legal immigrants. Mr. Speaker, I find these reductions in quality of life programs appalling.

How can my Republican colleagues praise this bill's work requirements when H.R. 3734 provides inadequate funding for education, training, and employment—essential components in contributing to longevity in the workforce? How can they stand by a bill that slashes more than \$3 billion in funding for meals to children in child care centers and homes? As if that were not devastating enough, this bill would cut nearly \$23 billion over 6 years from the Food Stamp Program and an additional \$23 billion in the SSI Program.

H.R. 3734 sends a signal to the Nation that our Government leaders place a very low priority on those individuals who have very little. In Cuyahoga County, we have a 20 percent poverty rate in a county of 1.4 million people. In the city of Cleveland, it is an alarming 42 percent. Throughout Cuyahoga County, more than 228,000 people receive food stamps. Many of these individuals constitute America's working poor. This punitive welfare measure will undoubtedly endanger their health and well-being.

Mr. Chairman, I can understand and support a balanced and rational approach to addressing the reform of our Nation's welfare system.